



ACUSOFT JOURNAL



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Atari Computer User's Society of Fayetteville

December 1987

President's Corner

Well gang here it is almost the end of the year, so before I forget let me wish all of you the happiest of holidays and may you find something Atari under your tree. Here's looking to the new year and growth for Acusoft.

First of all I would like to thank you for the great turnout at the last meeting. The following decisions were made. It was agreed that the bulletin board needs to be upgraded and also a method for getting the funds for this upgrade, namely selling some of the club's hardware at a fair market value. This should not have to be our only source of revenue, so let me hear from you with your ideas on fund raising projects. It was through your efforts that we got quite a bit accomplished. Now to the future. Acusoft is growing, however we are still shy of our goal of 50, so let's keep pushing on. This month's meeting should be very interesting. There will be a demonstration of the DeskCart and Empire for the ST, and on the 8 bit side for you word processing bugs there will be a demonstration of Atariwriter Plus.

Things are looking pretty good in the Atari community. The Mega ST is out. It is available on the west coast, but it is hard to find a distributor. Hopefully the Megs will find their way into the Carolinas and for those of you that may not be aware there are some fantastic hardware upgrades for your 8 bit. A good example is the 80 column adapter. Atari is working on Atariwriter 80 and Silent Butler 80 to support the XEP80. It will retail for about \$79.95. By the way Atari has also introduced a 1200 baud modem the SX212. It will retail for about \$99.95.

So much for the news. Now for the fun. Last month's trivia winner was Monty Pickett who correctly answered, "What do the letters ANALOG stand for as the title of the Atari periodical with that name?" Answer: Atari Newsletter and Lots of Games.

Well gang that is about it for now. Please keep in mind that we have to vote on a budget in January. The budget will be presented to you at this month's meeting. Once again have the happiest of holidays and don't forget, "My heart belongs to data".

Editor's Notes

I would imagine you have noticed the newsletter's new look! It's something I wanted to do last month but time always seems to get away from me. The newsletter is happily one of my personal priorities. Hope it is well received.

There will definitely be further changes made. All club members may not know this, but we are on an exchange program with other ATARI club newsletters all throughout the country. It is hoped we can publish professional products for these clubs as well as the general membership, and to use all existing ATARI systems.

This brings me to the heart of my editorial. Less filling!... Taste great!... Less filling!... Taste great!.. Nope, this not a beer commercial, it is like some of the conversations and articles I've noticed lately from 8-ers vs. STers. What's all the fuss Gus?

There are probably only four types of Atarians in existence... 1) 8's that will not be STs, 2) STs that were not 8's, 3) 8's that will be STs, and 4) STs that were once 8's. Let's think about that for a while. Got yourself neatly in one of these little categories? Good. OK everybody make room for MEGASI! Now where are we all now? There are probably only 12 or... 48... How many possibilities do we have now? Don't forget clones! The point is, ATARI clubs all over the country could start fragmenting into little groups with their own self interest. If this happens, nothing worthwhile could be accomplished, or worse, memberships could fall off and dwindle. Sounds familiar... well look at the membership count of ACUSOFT. 100 plus members last year, down to just over 30 active members today.

ACUSOFT members need to be interested in and sensitive to all those members that have different needs from themselves. Remember it is ATARI COMPUTER Users's Group of Fayetteville, not this system or that system. Find something yours has in common with other systems and explore it. Remember what user's groups are for!!!

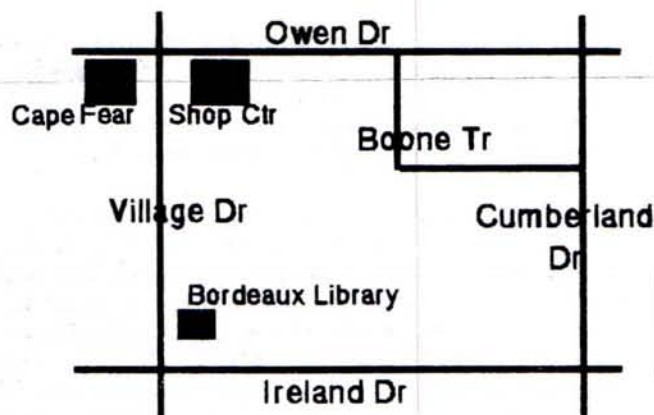
JOHN GILMORE
Editor

CURRENT BUSINESS

December Meeting

Again this month, the general membership meeting will be held Thursday, the 17th of December at the Bordeaux Branch of the Cumberland County Library. Scheduled school activities prevented us from using the Terry Sanford High School cafeteria last month, where our usual monthly meetings are held. There will be discussion of current business, hardware and software demonstrations, and just about any type of conversation to do with Atari computing. Bring your comments, help, advice, problems, or general computer expertise to the meeting. Remember what users groups are for, helping each other.

As a help, here below is a map for all who do not know the location of the Bordeaux Library. See you there!!!!



Messages to the Editor

Another month roles by and there are no messages/letter to the editor. Maybe no news is good news. In any event I will address any matters or questions you may have concerning all issues to do with Atari computers and/or ACUSOFT in general. Leave me a message on the board or send it by mail to our ACUSOFT address. If I can't answer it, one of our board members surely can.

Trivial Pursuit

Again this month, President of ACUSOFT, George LaRose, will present a 50 disk holder to the first person who calls him on the telephone with the name of the person who is considered the "Father of ATARI".

Buy, Sell or Trade

Members are allowed to bring software (originals only) and hardware to sell or trade at the monthly meetings. This is a non-commercial service for members only. Dealers may not participate. Individuals may make whatever deals they want, but no money may be allowed to exchange hands during the meeting. Remember, our policy is to display merchandise only before and after the regular meeting.

Help-Line

Here is the listing of people who are willing to help you with questions and problems you may have.

John Gilmore, 424-5640, Eves 6-9:30, general questions, word processing, telecommunications, newsletter.

Howard Abner, 484-7060, Eves 6-9:30. Data Perfect, SynCalc, word processing, Publishing Partner, general questions on 8-bit or ST.

Bill Gardner, 485-2619, Eves 7-10 SynFile, general questions.

GB Johnson, Eves 7-9. DB Man, VIP Professional, Publishing Partner, Flash.

Lyle Law, 864-7347, Eves before 10. BBS, anything!

Sam Carter, 425-5180, Eves 7-10. Deep Blue-C.

Ed Devenish, 567-6140, Eves 8-12, Anything for eight-bit.

Kenneth Boggs, 425-7299, Alt/Eves 3:30-10:30. Any ST questions.

Jeff Heinen, 432-9423/3085, anytime. ST Flight Sim, any ST questions

We would like your name and phone number in the newsletter help-line. You don't have to be a computer wiz, just be willing to help people with the problems they may have. Help can be on Games, Languages, Spreadsheets, Hardware, Graphics, Music, Repair, or ANYTHING!!!! You can sign up as an expert in an area, or just a specific program. If you can be of assistance, call me (John), or leave a message on the BBS. Remember how it was when you were looking for help.

THIS IS WHAT USER GROUPS ARE ALL ABOUT-HELPING EACH OTHER!!!!

AtariFest by Howard Abner

Three of our club's most diehard Atarians (Fred Deem, Lyle Law, and myself) set out early Friday morning (Oct 24) for Fairfax High School, Fairfax, VA. to attend the AtariFest sponsored by Novatari, one of the Washington DC area user groups. After a long drive, it was refreshing to arrive at the Fairfax high school and see the parking lot filled with cars. I thought to myself, could this many people actually own Atari computers? Were we at the right place? Obviously the answer was yes.

Upon entering the high school we registered and receive a ticket for door prizes that were given out throughout the day (we didn't win). The school's main corridor was lined with tables manned by the local Atari clubs. They were selling various public domain disks, mostly for the 8-bit machines. The main exhibit room (I think it was their cafeteria) had vendor booths around the perimeter. They consisted for the most part of Washington area computer stores selling their products. Prices were about what you would pay through mail order. No super buys. The Atari booth was conspicuously located in the center of the room; but more on their display later. Classrooms were used by many of the clubs to demonstrate a particular interest area ranging from telecommunication, printing, graphics, PC-Ditto, Magic Sac, sound, and others. Throughout the day, there were talks or seminars given by various representatives from the leading software developers and publishers. I listened to David Small reminisce about how the Magic Sac began and where it's heading. Later that morning a representative from Atari spoke on their status and future plans. Nothing earth shattering to report from Atari. Now for the real info.....

The new SX212 modem was for sale by many of the vendors. Going price was around \$89. This modem will work with both the XL/XE and ST, however, for XL/XE operation a R-handler is required. This is the same type handler required by the program "HomePac" by Batteries Included. Atari does not currently include the R-handler with the modem, nor do they provide the cable! When will Atari learn to give us a complete package? The ACUSOFT library does not have the R-handler; if anyone has access to it please upload it to the BBS or give a board member a call.

The XEP80-column box along with a demo version of the 80-column Atariwriter was demonstrated. The box is about the same size as the SX212 modem. The quality of the screen font was excellent on the Magnavox amber monitor (a TV is not suitable). As

a bonus, the box also has a parallel printer interface built-in. From what I could tell of their system, it looks like its going to be a real winner for 8-biters who want or need 80 columns. Please keep in mind that in order to get 80 columns, the software program MUST be specifically written for the XEP80 box. Time will tell if third party developers will support the 80-column XEP80. Price with the Atariwriter 80 should be around \$99.

Atari was really pushing their XE game system. They had two systems setup using large TVs (25 inch). All the kids were were happily trying out the video gun shooting barnyard animals which is included with the system. Atari naturally had their new 16-bit products on display- several Mega STs with a Laser Printer, and one PC clone. See our Nov newsletter for a thorough description of the Mega. The PC looked very similar to the Megs with the real noticeable difference being the IBM style keyboard. The PC, however, wasn't really being demonstrated, it was there for display purposes only.

I tried to talk to Neil Harris about the PC and its availability but all he would say is that the Mega is consuming their time right now.

3rd party products on display include: Supercharged Easy Draw--a drawing program with the ability to handle publishing type tasks (looks good); Deskart--a cartridge based desk accessory program chock full of useful features (Fred Deem bought one); IMG Scan--a low cost video scanning device that fits on your printer's head; Word Perfect--the ultimate word processor for writing the great american novel; HD+ by Astra--a 20 Mbyte hard drive with a double sided floppy; two different graphics tablets, and many other various products.

Like any loyal Atari enthusiast, I brought my computer with me. After dinner, the three of us spent the evening playing Hardball and Empire. Overall the trip was extremely worthwhile but expensive! If you ever get the chance to attend a computer fair, by all means, do it.



ST NEWS

TOS ROMS -- Blitter Version

Taken from ST report #6
Publication of Zmagazine (c) 1987

The 1987 revision of TOS is scheduled for release in conjunction with the new "blitter" chip. The new TOS has been upgraded to include support for the hardware blit as well as retaining the software blit functions for full compatibility with older software which relies on hardware timing (a definite no-no).

Changes in the new ROMs are:

RS232: The RS232 handler has been completely rewritten. RTS/CTS handshaking now works. Baud rates 50 and 75 now work.

CLOCK: Support is now included for the Mega ST's built-in, battery-backer-up realtime clock. The realtime clock is automatically used by the XBIOS gettime and settime functions for the IKBD. The GEMDOS clock is reset from the realtime clock at the termination of every program.

STARTUP: Memory clear at system startup is much faster, improving performance on multi-megabyte systems.

DESKTOP: The desktop now includes a control for deactivating/activating the blitter chip. Also, the Save Desktop and Print Screen selections will request confirmation. Spurious characters are no longer written to the DESKTOP.INF file. Doing a PRINT or SHOW from the desktop will now display characters with ASCII codes above 127. SHOW and PRINT use a larger buffer now. Single drive copies now require fewer disk swaps.

CART: Cartridge handling has been revised, eliminating the need for "CARTSTART" code and allowing .TOS and .TTP programs. Lower case letters will now be accepted and passed to an application from the "Open Application ... Parameter" box.

AES: The AES will now send repeat clicks if the mouse button is held down on the arrow or page controls of a window, which lets a window smooth scroll. The AES underscore bug is now fixed. APPL_TPLAY and APPL_TRECORD now work. The limit of 30 characters on a line in an alert box is now rigidly enforced.

MOUSE: The mouse redraw can now be set to XOR mode. The system will return after a single click if this is what was requested.

DMA: The DMA bus can now have more than one device attached at powerup time, without any special software.

FLOPPY: The floppy read/write code checks for more errors now. In prior versions, the system would not report a CRC error under certain circumstances; now it will. This hurts some copy protection schemes. The format of the floppy disk has been skewed from track to track to improve disk speed; the XBIOS supports this by using -1 for the skew value and placing a pointer to a one word per sector skew table in the previously unused longword.

VDI: The VDI will now draw arcs with small angles. BIOS: Character out routines are much faster.

BLITTER: Automatic blitter chip support is included in line-A and VDI calls. The extended inquire will report a larger performance factor than before, allowing applications to check for the presence of the blitter. A new XBIOS call has been added to check for the blitter and to activate or deactivate it. The blit is not reentrant -- line-A and VDI should not be called from within an interrupt.

REGISTER: The registers D0, D1, D2, A0, A1, A2 have always been forfeit when a trap call was made. Now the demise of these occurs under more conditions than before.

MEMORY: Slightly more RAM is used by the system. Programs that were close to the edge on a 520ST may no longer fit.

VARIABLE: Most undocumented system variables have been moved. You were warned!

NOTES AND WARNINGS:

1. Some programs depend on the OS always being at \$FC0000. This is "not" cast in stone and will probably change soon. To find the OS header, use the pointer "sysbase" as documented.

2. The 4 megabyte ST puts the screen near the end of accessible RAM. Sloppy programs that have been writing past the end of the screen will give bus errors if they do so on the 4 meg ST.



Datatrieve
by: Bill Silverman

Taken from ST Report #6
Publication of Zmagazine (c) 1987
Capital District Atari Computer Enthusiasts, Aug 87

The search for good reliable serious software has had it's ups and downs in the years that Atari has been making computers. The Atari 800 VisiCalc was not a complete implementation of that old standby and it was not until the release of Syn Calc that any Atari computer had a viable full featured serious software product.

I am happy to say that Datatrieve from Abacus Software is another fine addition to serious software for Atari computers - specifically the ST.

Datatrieve is not a relational database. It is, in fact something of a relational database in reverse. In essence you design a large database and then create custom report and screen formats to view those fields you wish to see. With some programs designing screen 'masks' and report formats require extensive knowledge of the program and perhaps a dash or two of macro mania, thankfully Datatrieve is an intelligent implementation of GEM allowing construction and selection fields, screens, reports, lists, labels, and even full form letters with either icons or menus that are mouse selected or keystroke commands. You can create some really fascinating formats for either screen or paper with Datatrieve with very little effort and little reading of the manual.

The program is basically a super index card filer which you can enter through any custom designed door (screen or report) you like. Having used this program since last January to keep track of 1100 children in a soccer club it's strengths and weaknesses have become apparent. Without a doubt the strong points of this program make it's drawbacks almost meaningless.

From that perspective we'll take those weak points first:

- * you cannot move all types of data freely from one drive path to another. Some you can some can't. Worse, the manual doesn't tell you what is allowed to be moved and what is not. Learning what moves from a pathway and what does not is strictly a trial and error experience.

- * the program does not remember where it goes for some types of files and does for some others. Therefore, a disproportionate share of the time you spend transporting subfiles or records from one file

to another is spent with a mouse 'reminding' Datatrieve where you want the data to go. (On the other hand it does this flawlessly)

- * there is a DIF option that is somewhat misleading. In reality it is really a mail merge option where you can customize field and record delimiters to match up to the requirements of your word processor. (On the other hand it is a great feature, Datatrieve and ST Writer are the equal of some software packages that cost over \$300 and they cost under \$40.00 combined)

- * you have the option of selecting fields you want to use when transporting to and from files. When you save this field selection it becomes the default standard for all future data transfers. (But you are always asked if you want to save field selections and if you answer no then the current choice is only temporary)

- * you can only sort the main database on one field at a time.

- * the program is copy protected and there is a hidden charge of \$10.00 for a backup copy.

STRONG POINTS:

- * the program comes with ram disks ranging from 100k to 600k so you can fit really large files into a ram disk.

- * with a file on a ram disk and searching through an indexed field or multiple fields record selection is functionally instantaneous.

- * files can have unlimited numbers of subfiles. These subfiles can be sorted on any number of fields (the first field sorted has the lowest priority the last field sorted has the highest priority). (But you must do the sorts one at a time - click the mouse at the field, select the sort subrange (file) menu with a click, select the sort option from the dialog box, watch the little clock 'fill' until the job is done. On the other hand a 200 to 300 record sub file sorts in about 15 seconds including mousing around!)

- * you can have up to four files open at the same time and effortlessly transport records between them using what Datatrieve calls sequential records (better be sure the databases are set for the same number of fields!)

- * a paper form can be literally duplicated on the screen.

- * the user interface of this program is exceptionally easy. We have had dozens of parents come over for

a couple of hours each to help type in information. The tutorial is a one record demo followed by two or so records of supervised instruction. The menus, icons, and red stickers on three function keys really make this a program a snap to learn. Within fifteen minutes of sitting down with the program for the first time people are able to work quickly and independently (NOTE: the biggest problem for an adult is coordinating mouse movement to arrow movement on the screen - finally a functional reason for adults to play arcade style

* most important - this program does not bomb out. When I've done something stupid a dialog box pops up to tell me so. When the program hits a TOS error a cryptic TOS error box appears and with a press return you regain control of the computer so you can save your file(s) back to disk and then try to FIGURE OUT WHAT WENT WRONG.

SUMMARY:

Datatrieve is a highly proficient database program. It is basically an index card type database but has immense size (number of fields, number of records) capabilities, extraordinary screen, report, list, and label capabilities, an ingenious interface between the computer and user offering the choice of icons, drop down menus, or keystrokes for most operations. In short it is the most useful ST program I have yet encountered.

Datatrieve by Abacus Software has a suggested retail price \$49.95 (plus \$10.00 extra for a backup copy of the program). It is available mail order for around \$35.00.

FOR YOUR INFO..

ZMAG Atari News Update From CIS Online Today/AP

August 24, ATARI CORP. wants to buy the Federated Group Inc.'s 65-store retail electronics chain for \$67.3 million. By this Friday, it will tender an offer for the 10.7 million outstanding shares of Federated stock, seeking to gain control of stores in California, Arizona, Texas and Kansas.

According to The Associated Press, Federated's seven-member board unanimously approved the \$6.25-a-share offer, noting the firm "has had trouble finding retailers for its products. Among other things, the merger hinges on the approval of Federated's lenders."

Federated lost \$895,000 in the first quarter ended May 31, compared with a profit of \$662,000 for the same period last year, the wire service says. Sales rose 2 percent to \$91.1 million.

Atari's own financial picture has improved lately. In the latest quarter, its profits were up 39.3 percent to \$13.54 million, while revenue rose 16.4 percent to \$70.69 million.

The Associated Press reports that the deal, which is subject to approval by a five-bank consortium that has extended Federated a \$48 million line of credit, was worked out with Federated founder/chief executive Wilfred Schwartz, who will continue to run Atari's Federated subsidiary.

The wire service notes, "Most of Federated's stores cover half an acre and boast a vast selection of electronic specialty merchandise, including Atari's bottom-line personal computers."

Atari's Kawalick comments, "This particular acquisition gives us additional distribution channels in certain parts of the country."

August 28, Atari Corp. Chairman Jack Tramiel says his firm's acquisition of the 67-store Federated Group electronics store chain will be a mighty tool against Japanese competitors.

Tramiel told The Associated Press, "Our Japanese counterparts all have their own stores in Japan. I like to copy success." He also said that there are "no consumer electronics companies today in the United States. We need to rebuild that and I think we can do it."

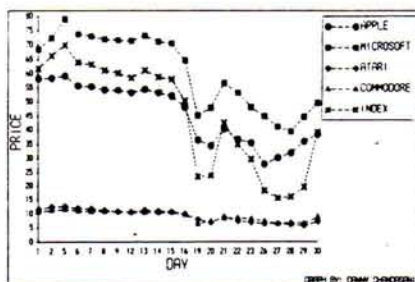
Atari revealed Monday that it is acquiring Federated, which has stores in five Western states, for \$67.3 million. AP quotes Tramiel as saying that Federated was bought in order to reduce the time it takes for products to be accepted by dealers. And "the move will also spread research and development costs over a larger organization," the wire service said.

The Market As I See It

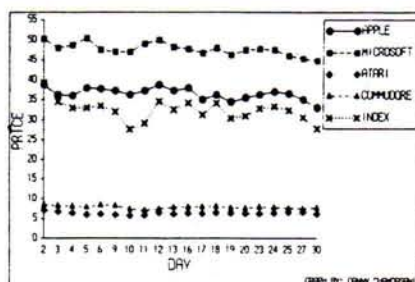
Editorial by Sam Carter
Graphs by Danny Shamdasani

There are two graphs this month because I did not get last month's information to the editor. I thought you all would like to see last month's graph because it shows the effects of black Monday and a week later, what I refer to as gray Monday.

October 1987



November 1987



Looking at percent of value lost, Atari and Commodore have not seen a rebound yet, but neither have the other high tech manufacturers. While the remainder of the market has been very volatile, the "Home makers" have a definite course that does not look good at present. A strong Christmas market could change the picture temporarily. The beginning of the Christmas shopping season have retailers reporting sales up from last year but not as much as expected. At this point Black Monday seems to have had little effect on the Christmas shoppers. While the news media seem to be trying to act as a catalyst to create some gloomy news by not letting anyone forget about Black Monday 1987, retailers have been reported as saying that money lost on the stock market was not money investors were going to spend for Christmas anyway. If that is the case then Atari should see a strong Christmas, especially on the game market front. While a majority of retail customers do not own stock, it is still feared that "Black Monday" may scare them away from medium and big ticket items for the Christmas buying frenzy because of their uncertainty of a gloomy future. This, of course, would include computers.

The computer market will be interesting to watch. Atari has lost precious time in getting to market an IBM compatible, the Megas are late, and with the clone makers driving their prices to ridiculous levels. The old saying of "Power without Price" is just that ... "OLD". "AT" compatible machines based on the 80286 microprocessor running at 10mhz are now selling for as little as \$1395 complete with monitor,

1.2 meg drives, 1 meg of memory, printer and 20 megabyte hard disk! XT compatible systems with 640k are selling for \$795.00. The general public is thinking that "this is all I'll ever need" because these systems follow a standard that is well defined and will no doubt be around for some time to come. Atari would do well to introduce PC compatible machines and get them to market soon. This would be a safety net of business for Atari to retain those who do not want to brave the perils of the new world of 68000 based computers. It would also be a signal to the personal computer market that Atari is serious about the market place, and by continuing with additional support of the ST line of computers, it would also be a signal that in spite of its PC compatible market that Atari is serious about the ST. Think about this for a minute. If you were looking through a PC magazine and saw a number of companies advertising PC compatibles with names like "STANDARD", "United", "Executive", "Maxum" IMS (Intelligent Micro Systems), "Altec", "Club", "Bentley", "QIC Research", "FiveStar" and "Atari", which computer would you buy if the price of a 80286 system were \$1400? Add to that the possibility of Atari selling these machines in the discount distribution market such as Best Products, Sears, Penney's and you have local access of a familiar name that everyone can live with. I also think that Atari could put together this system and sell it at a retail of \$1000.00 in monochrome and \$1400 in VGA color mode. Even if Atari had to sell this system at \$100 more than the other names mentioned, it would matter little from the public's point of view to pay a \$50 - \$150 premium the buy a familiar name that they perceive as being around for a while (or does Atari have the confidence that Atari themselves will be around a while). Atari could concentrate on development of software and hardware for the ST line without touching the PC compatible. After all, what could Atari contribute to the PC compatible world that is not already developed? That would mean that Atari's PC compatible needs to have five to eight expansion slots too. None of this expansion chassis bull. The biggest criticism that I have heard from others in the market for a computer is that the Atari machines look like something that Doctor Frankenstein would have conceived or even worse ... "Rosemary's Baby". Power supplies under foot, cords running all over the place... I have tried to conceal this mess but whenever I move my system my wife always asks "is that safe? Our IBMs at school don't look like that. Let's get an IBM".

From my point of view it seems that Atari's future will be based on offering a complete line of computers. This would include the ST line of computers, an IBM PC compatible and even continued support of the old eight bit line of computers.

DEC MGT

DATE:
DEC 17

TIME:
7 PM

PLACE:
BORDEAUX LIBRAR.

The Atari Computer User's Society of Fayetteville (ACUSOFT) is an independent computer user's club and is not affiliated in any way with Atari Inc. The sole purpose of the club is to develop and share the computer knowledge of the members. Piracy of software will not be tolerated by the club or fostered in any way.

Membership dues are \$24 per year. Payment of dues entitles the member: to attend meetings, vote, receive newsletter, and to utilize the club library and BBS. Each resident in the household of a member is considered an associated member. Associate members are entitled to the same privileges as a regular member, but will not be eligible to vote. Only one newsletter will be sent to each household.

Other Atari user's groups will receive a copy of the newsletter without charge if a copy of their own is sent in return. Such groups may extract any portion of the ACUSOFT Journal for their own use, providing acknowledge of the source and author is made.

Advertising space is available. Please write ACUSOFT, P.O. Box 1117, Fayetteville, N.C. 28302 for further details.

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	868-6690
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Treasurer: Howard Abner	484-7060
Newsletter: John Gilmore	424-5640
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ST-Librarian: Pat Fischer	822-5053
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